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ASSOCIATION

FOR

Improving the Condition of the Poor.

FIRST REPORT

OF A

COMMITTEE ON THE SANITARY CONDITION
OF THE LABORING CLASSES

IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

WITH

REMEDIAL SUGGESTIONS.

NEW-YORK:

JOHN F. TROW, PRINTER, 49 ANN STREET.

1853.



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Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor.

At the stated meeting of the Board, June 13th, 1853, the Secretary having submitted a few statements in relation to the tenements of the poor, the subjoined Resolution was adopted :

Resolved, That a Committee be appointed, to inquire into the sanitary condition of the dwellings occupied by the laboring classes in this City ; also, the practicability of devising remedial measures, with instructions to report at the next meeting of the Board.

In compliance with the foregoing Resolution, the Committee respectfully

REPORT:

That since their appointment, they have diligently prosecuted their inquiries in relation to the subject. For this purpose, the personal investigations of your Secretary have been put in requisition ; also the valuable local knowledge of the City Missionaries and several Visitors of this Association, to whom a circular asking for facts and statements was addressed. Having, in the time allotted them, neglected no reliable means of information within their reach, they beg herewith to submit the result of their inquiries and deliberations.

The subject, though specially referring to the laboring classes,

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deeply concerns our citizens generally. For aside from the sympathy which the sufferings of our fellow-citizens and neighbors should excite, all, whatever may be their social position, have a personal interest in the sanitary condition and morals of the community in which they live. By providing the laboring classes with better tenements, improved ventilation, and healthy and cleanly arrangements in respect to yards, sinks and sewerage, they will certainly suffer less from sickness and premature mortality, and a vast amount of pauperism, crime, and wretchedness be prevented. On the other hand, it is a well established fact, that diseases are not confined to the localities where they originate, but widely diffuse their poisonous miasma. Hence, though the poor may fall in greater numbers because of their nearer proximity to the causes of disease, yet the rich, who inhabit the splendid squares and spacious streets of this metropolis, often become the victims of the same disorders which afflict their poorer brethren. Nor should the momentous fact be overlooked, that the same causes which occasion a great amount of physical suffering to the laborer, and a high rate of mortality, at the same time impair his ability for self-support, increase taxation, and present almost insuperable obstacles to his social elevation, and moral and religious improvement. It would appear, therefore, that to place within the reach of the humblest in the community the elevating influences of healthy and attractive homes, is an object not only deserving the special attention of our City Government, but which should be regarded as one of the most interesting and useful efforts of benevolence.

The Board are aware, that while much in late years has been done in this city for the physical and moral elevation of the poor in other respects, little comparatively has been effected for improving their tenements, though it is doubtful whether in any other city they are less adequately provided for than in New-York. This is, doubtless, one of the causes why, notwithstanding the unsurpassed salubrity of its position, that the average

mortality here is strikingly greater than in any other of our Northern cities. And one reason why more has not been attempted in this direction is, that capitalists, who alone possess the means of erecting better buildings, appear not to have known until recently how much the laboring classes suffer from this cause ; another is, the opinion which long prevailed, that such property was unproductive ; a third, the crowding of houses to meet the demand occasioned by the unprecedented influx of emigrants ; and a fourth, the absence of proper legal sanitary regulations. Although in regard to the two former some favorable change has been made, it is certain that no radical improvements will be undertaken until the subject is better understood, and the reformatory power of the law more effectually evoked.

This Association being early impressed with the necessity which existed for improving the dwellings and the domiciliary habits of the laboring classes, has for many years given considerable attention to the subject, as one legitimately coming within the scope of its objects.

Its first plan for this purpose involved the idea of a special organization, which, in order to show the practicability of the scheme, should erect one or more *model dwellings*, replete with every requisite for health, comfort and economy, at rents not exceeding those ordinarily paid for the lowest class of tenements. Preliminary to the intended prosecution of the work, much valuable information pertaining thereto was obtained in this and other cities, from which was elaborated the design for a kind of buildings that was believed would combine in an eminent degree such improvements as the beneficent objects in view required.

This scheme of erecting model dwellings was primarily suggested by their alleged utility in several European cities. But farther reflection and inquiry demonstrating that it would be impracticable here to accomplish like results by like methods, a different course was adopted ; in carrying out which, the designs

were lithographed, and the needful improvements extensively urged upon the attention of capitalists and builders, by a circular, and the gratuitous distribution of copies of the plans among them. Thus the movement, though taking a different form than was anticipated, has by the information diffused, and the interest excited, been probably not less useful than if the original plan had been consummated.

But, unhappily, the present condition of thousands in this City, shows that the improvements effected have fallen vastly short of the wants of the population. Every honest, sober, and industrious resident, should at least have it in his power to procure a decent and healthy home for himself and family. This is now impossible to multitudes who dwell in this City. The position and shape of New-York being peculiar, and differing both in these respects and in geographical area from most other capital cities, the methods of providing dwellings for the laboring classes should correspondingly differ. Being hemmed in on either side by water, the only direction in which it can be extended is rapidly filling up with places of business and residences of the opulent. Very many of the poor must consequently remain in portions of the City already too densely crowded, and destined to still greater concentration as the population increases ; and the high value of land will not allow them comfortable habitations, except it be most advantageously improved for this purpose, by re-modelling the houses already erected, or building others expressly for their use. The unfortunate individuals who are compelled to reside in those wretched localities, pent up in the close, foul air of incommodious houses and courts, which generate disease, have no resources in themselves to remedy these terrible evils. They must, moreover, live near their places of work ; and such is the over-crowded state of some districts, that, if houses more fitted for the habitations of brute animals than of human beings are suffered to exist, they are sure of being tenanted, though at the sacrifice of health, morals and life.

In view of these facts, can it be the dictate of a humane and considerate policy, to appropriate so large a space of our already too contracted area, for *public parks*? Of their sanitary advantages under proper circumstances, there can be no doubt; but our local peculiarity will not justify the reasons which apply to other cities. It is self-evident, that the using of so much of the Island as is now designed for this purpose, will so diminish the space otherwise available for dwellings, as directly and indirectly to increase the intolerable grievances of high rents and crowded tenements which multitudes now suffer, without affording any compensatory advantages that will benefit the great mass of the population. Its general effects on the health, morals and prosperity of the City, it is believed, will be decidedly unfavorable. The subject, however, is not introduced for discussion, but to show that the municipal policy, at least in this instance, appears to be the reverse of that which the present and prospective public good demands. There being, in short, a culpable amount of apathy in relation to the tenements of the poor, growing out of a lack of correct information on the subject, it is proposed to present a few from the voluminous facts obtained, to illustrate the evils in question as they actually exist, with a view to some definite action for their removal.

In the lower wards, there are thousands of poor persons, but comparatively few buildings suitable for their accommodation. Most of the houses are those which were formerly occupied by the wealthy who have removed up town; and now in their dilapidated state, many of them are tenanted by miserably poor Irish and German emigrants. Large rooms have been divided by rough partitions, into dwellings for two or three families—each, perhaps, taking boarders, where they wash, cook, eat, sleep and die—many of them prematurely, for the circumstances in which they live make fearful havoc of health and life. And *in addition, night lodgers*, consisting of homeless men, women and children, are not unfrequent, who for a trifling sum are al-

lowed temporary shelter. There, huddled together, like cattle in pens, the inmates are subjected to the most debasing influences. Many of the dwellings, moreover, are out of repair; and the yards, from neglect of the sinks, in so vile a condition they can scarcely be stepped into, without contracting filth of the most offensive kind. Yet, however pent up or dirty these places, other things being equal, the rents are from 25 to 30 per cent. higher than up town. The usual charges for single rooms, in the second or third stories, are from eight to twelve dollars a month; and for basement or attic rooms, from four to six dollars a month. The premises are usually sub-let to tenants who pay in advance, by an Irish or German liquor seller, who manages to occupy the best apartments himself, at their expense, and to pocket a considerable surplus.

The resident poor in the First Ward have doubled since 1846; and, according to the estimate of the Missionary, there are now within its limits, of that class needing relief, not less than *fifteen thousand persons*. Yet it has not been found, that any special provision of tenements has been made for this mass of indigent population.

In the upper wards, there are some habitations for the laboring classes, where their wants and comforts have been regarded, and in which it is possible to maintain the decencies of life. Generally, however, they are inferior in size and structure to those already considered. Crazy old buildings—crowded rear tenements in filthy yards—dark, damp basements—leaky garrets, shops, out-houses, and stables converted into dwellings, though scarcely fit to shelter brutes—are the habitations of thousands of our fellow-beings, in this wealthy Christian city. But as facts will better exhibit their character than general descriptions, let them speak.

In Oliver-street, Fourth Ward, for example, is a miserable rear building, 16 feet by 30, two stories and garret, three rooms on each of the first and second floors, and four in the attic—in all, ten

small apartments, which contain *fourteen families*. The entrance is through a narrow, dirty alley, and the yard and appendages of the filthiest kind; yet the rent of the rooms averages one dollar and a half per week each, or \$750 a year for the premises, which is at least 30 per cent. on their value. In the same ward, there is a front and rear building, six stories above the basement, which contains 56 families, numbering 250 persons. In Cherry-street, is a "tenement house," on two lots, extending back from the street about 150 feet, five stories above the basement, so arranged as to contain 120 families, or more than 500 persons. A small room and bedroom are allowed each family in this building, which is of the better class; but the direful consequences of imperfect ventilation and over-crowding are¹ severely felt. There are, probably, in this ward, from 40 to 50 tenant houses, averaging 24 families each.

But the most objectionable habitations in this district are the cellars, in some instances six feet under ground—which have to be baled out after every rain storm—and are so damp as to destroy health—so dark as to prevent industry—and so low that ventilation is impossible. Though utterly unavailable for any other use, they are rented at rates which ought to procure comfortable dwellings, to persons who have become as debased in character, as the condition is degrading in which they live.

Sub-letting is common in this ward, which increases rents about 25 per cent.

In the Fifth and most other wards, in order to improve every foot of ground, tenements are crowded together in pent up courts, which extend the whole length of the lots; and though some of these are superior to many of the old rickety buildings which are occupied by the poor, they are generally so faulty in arrangement, as neither to subserve health, convenience, comfort, or economy. One of these, for illustration, containing eight small apartments, with bedrooms attached, each tenanted by a family at one dollar and a half per week, or \$624

a year, was computed to yield an interest of over 20 per cent. on the investment, after paying for repairs, taxes and insurance. Another description of building, containing 25 families, on a lot 25 feet by 100, and assessed at \$6500, yielded an annual income, exclusive of taxes, repairs, &c., of \$1950, or 30 per cent. on the assessed value. Yet these exorbitant rents command but few comforts. Most of the tenements are filthy and wretched in the extreme; the direct tendency of which is to induce disease, lower moral character, and take away all thrift and care for decency and cleanliness.

In the Sixth Ward, the manner in which many of the poor live, and the extent to which vice and degradation prevails, is too well known to require description. Many are in a condition incomparably worse than the hovel dwellers, where father, mother, children and swine, live and lodge together. These dens of squalid wretchedness, intemperance and filth, pay a rent which should afford the occupants comfortable homes. Four houses and lots, indiscriminately taken, valued at \$40,500, contain 87 families, and rent for \$6000, or more than 17 per cent. Another lot, with a new five-story building, contains 48 families, and rents for \$3892, or more than 26 per cent. One block, by enumeration, was ascertained to contain 365 families, numbering 1562 persons—average size of apartments, 10 feet by 12, the ceilings of some of which were too low to allow the inmates to stand erect. Many rooms were without fireplaces, and so constructed that there was no possibility for the entrance or escape of air except by the door or crevices of the windows. The tenements, yards and sinks, were in a most filthy and disgusting condition; in several places there were accumulations of stagnant fluid, full of all sorts of putrefying matter, the effluvia from which was intolerable—and in addition to all this, most of the roofs were leaky, and the basements, after every rain, were flooded with filthy water. Yet, even these wretched tenements rent at from 5 to 7 dollars per

month—a sum which should afford the occupants comfortable habitations.

In the Seventh Ward, there are some few decent tenant-houses, but more of a contrary description. In Munroe-street, for example, there are two rear, rough-built, clap-boarded tenements, a few feet apart, size, 24 by 12, containing four rooms each, and each a family. The premises let for \$312 per annum, which is more than the buildings are worth. Another kind of house, tenanted by the poor in Scammel-street, valued at \$4000, lets for \$850, or more than twenty per cent. on the investment.

In the Eighth Ward, the apartments occupied by the laboring classes are usually 8 by 12, and some 12 by 15 feet, with a small bedroom attached, which are not unfrequently occupied by two or three families. A large part of this kind of property being on leased ground, very little is expended for repairs. The buildings thus occupied, being mostly old, and having been designed for several families, are extremely inconvenient, and ill suited to their present use. There are, however, exceptions in the case of houses specially erected for the poor, some of which are well adapted to their purpose. But the following are not of that class, though characteristic of the tenements usually occupied by them in this district. A lot, 60 by 100 feet, containing front and rear buildings, in which are 58 rooms and bedrooms; 18 of them are 8 by 13, and the remainder 12 by 13 feet. The rents range from \$4 50 to \$6 50 each per month, always payable in advance, and yielding for the whole \$3600 per annum, which sum is estimated to be about 50 per cent. on the investment. Another lot, 50 by 60 feet, contains 20 stables, rented for dwellings, at \$15 a year each, the whole cost of which was only \$600. An experienced builder, long a resident in the ward, affirms, that many of the worst class of houses pay an interest on their value of 100 per cent.

This ward is by no means the poorest in the city, yet it has

spots of poverty, filth, and degradation, which are scarcely surpassed by any other. "Rotten Row," as it is appropriately termed, in Laurens-street, is one of these. It consists of 8 houses on either side of the street, fronting each other, with as many more in the rear, containing in all about 250 families, and not less than 1250 persons, in a space of about 180 feet, by perhaps a depth of 50 feet on each side. The pestiferous stench and filth of these pent-up tenements exceed description. "In one room," says a Visitor, "six people are living, with hens scratching about on the bed. Every corner of these buildings is occupied—cellars and garrets. All the lower rooms and basements pay \$4 50 a month for rent. If the statements of the people are correct, the rent of each house is about \$480 per annum, which would give for this miserable block of buildings, front and rear, an annual return to the owner of \$7680."

The Ninth Ward affords numerous sites for the erection of healthy and convenient habitations for the laboring classes; but at present contains but few so-called tenant houses, yet some of the latter class have been built, of which the following may be taken as a specimen. The lot is 25 by 103 feet; the building is 16 feet, extending longitudinally from the street to the end of the lot—two stories and basement, with a yard, including the verandah, of 8 feet. The sink is placed under the stairs, being but 6 or 8 feet deep, and having no connection with a sewer, diffuses its noxious and offensive effluvia through the house. It contains 8 families, and is estimated to yield more than 15 per cent.

Most of the houses occupied by the poor in this ward, are very deficient in the requisites for health, decency, and comfort. Sewerage is but partially introduced; and the consequent accumulations of fluid, filth, and putrid mud, poisoning the atmosphere, squalor and debasement are visible in all such localities. Sub-letting being common in this district, the worst of these habitations are estimated to pay from 12 to 25 per cent. on the investment.

In the Tenth Ward, the dimensions of this class of tenements were mostly found to be 10 by 12, and 10 by 14 feet; the average number of persons to a room five—six families in a house, and the rents paying about 14 per cent.

The best habitations for the laboring classes in this district, are the recently built tenant houses; but these are overstocked with inmates, and in many instances, very badly arranged: the sleeping rooms, for example, are frequently without means of ventilation, being dark, or having windows 18 inches square, with fixed lattices.

In the Eleventh and Thirteenth Wards, we find the same general disregard to sanitary laws, and to the comfort of the laboring classes, which are so unhappily characteristic of many other parts of the City, yet without any advantages in respect to rents. A miserable house and lot in Mangin-street, 30 by 100 feet, valued at \$6000, lets for \$1008, or $16\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. Another in Goerck-street, 18 by 100, valued at \$4500, 24 apartments, rents for \$2 75 per month each, or \$792 per annum, which is about 18 per cent. This building is in a most wretched condition—the roof is leaky, and the sink communicating with the cellar, gives out its offensive and deadly gas, which pollutes the air of the whole house. In the Thirteenth Ward, the rents average from 15 to 25 per cent. on the investments.

In the Fourteenth Ward, the character and rents of the houses occupied by the laboring classes, generally correspond with those already described. In many instances, the buildings cover the entire lot, the apartments are contracted, and so arranged as not to admit of ventilation. A tenant house in Marion-street is said to pay 22 per cent.; and the general average is from 15 to 25 per cent.

In the Sixteenth Ward, some houses are building which promise to increase the comforts of the poor, at prices they are able to pay. Almost universally, however, dwellings of little value and affording miserable accommodations, pay exorbitant

rents ; in many cases fifty per cent. on the investment, which is the less excusable, because of the less comparative value of the lots. But such is the demand for tenements, by the press of newly arrived emigrants, that in the suburbs of the City, mere shanties and hovels with earthen floors, find occupants at high rates.

Details like the foregoing might be indefinitely multiplied from the remaining up-town and other wards ; but as they would unduly swell this Report, without adding important facts, they are omitted as unnecessary to the present object. Those given, it will be observed, are designed to represent the different parts of the City, so as to afford authentic data for correct general inductions.

It is evident from the foregoing survey, that the dwellings of the industrious classes in this City are not generally adapted to the wants of the human organization, nor compatible with the health, or the social or moral improvement of the occupants. Among the causes in this relation which deteriorate health and morals, a few of the more prominent may, in review, be noticed.

First. The crowded condition of the dwellings in which the poor are compelled to live. This applies to at least three-fourths of the tenements occupied by the laboring classes in this City. A room, seldom more than ten feet by twelve, or less, with a bedroom, is the most usually allowed in the better class of these dwellings ; and even if conveniently arranged, would be sadly deficient for one family of the ordinary size. What then must be the discomfort, disease and demoralization of the thousands who have but a single apartment of the most inferior kind, of small dimensions, low ceilings, &c., and that crowded with two or three, and sometimes four or five families ? An awful sacrifice of health, life and morals is inseparable from such a condition. This, however, is scarcely more than a negative view of the facts. Such tenements are almost invariably surrounded with disgusting filth, evolving poisonous gases, and with various

other local unhealthy influences, which are scarcely less injurious to the inmates, than is their pent-up in-door life. It is manifest that such conditions of living are in utter disregard of all the physical laws which bear upon the subject. From the nature of our organization, a constant and large supply of *pure air* is essential to our existence. If we have not this abundant supply in a pure form, disease and death are the consequences. If, as physicians affirm, each individual daily requires fifty-seven hogs-heads of pure air for the preservation of health, there can be no surprise at the loss of health in those who seldom or never breathe a pint of it. Fevers, consumptions, choleras, dysenteries, and other mortal diseases, are the necessary results.

Now, an extensive examination of the domicils of the poor, shows that they are too contracted to admit of an adequate supply of pure air, for the number of inmates. From careful scientific calculations elsewhere made, and which apply to many tenements in this City, it is proved that in numerous instances, human life could not be sustained in them more than seven hours ; that is to say, such is the construction of the apartments, that with the door and window shut, the sleepers would exhaust the vital properties of the air, and perish as did the persons in the black-hole of Calcutta. It is not considered out of place here to remark, that every time we breathe, we vitiate the air taken into the lungs, by retaining one part of its component elements, which combines with the blood, refreshing and purifying it, while the remainder is returned unfit to be breathed again. Hence it follows, that even one person shut up in a small air-tight chamber, would not live through a single day. It is computed that the population of a crowded city, by the mere natural action of their lungs, in the course of twenty-four hours, vitiate a layer of air as large as the whole area inhabited, at least a yard in depth or thickness ; to say nothing of the amount spoiled and rendered unfit for breathing by fires, and furnaces, lamps, candles, gas, gas-works, nuisances, and all manner of

deleterious manufactories. Were it not for the providential arrangement that air thus vitiated is in constant motion to ascend, making way for fresh air to take its place, we should always be in danger of suffocation in a room without a draft, or in a city without a wind. This explains why the contracted and crowded tenements of the poor become a permanent source of ill health—a fact which is fully established by the testimony of the Visitors of this Association and other Charities, by Dispensary Statistics, and the City Inspector's Reports.

Second. Too great density of population in certain districts is another evil. In this particular another principle, important to the maintenance of a sound sanitary condition, is in numerous instances overlooked. It is a settled law, that the number of persons on a given *area of soil* cannot be increased beyond a certain limit, without endangering health. If, for illustration, a one-story dwelling 25 by 40 feet may safely accommodate ten persons, another ten cannot occupy a second story over the same ground with impunity, nor without risk to the health of those in the first story; and as the air vitiated by respiration ascends, if a third, a fourth or fifth story is added and occupied, as is common, especially in new tenant houses, the danger to all is increased in a fearful ratio. In proof of this, a distinguished physician states, that of 15 men who were employed on a second floor, only *four* made any complaint of illness; of 17 employed in precisely the same way, on the third and uppermost floor, 3 had spitting of blood, 2 had affections of the lungs, and 5 constant and severe colds. In other words, *ten* of these 17 suffered from diseases affecting the chest, while only *one* in the room beneath had a disease of this nature. In another room similarly constructed, the health of but four out of 20 in the lower room were injuriously affected, while ten out of 20 in the upper room were diseased. “It is not, therefore, the number of cubic feet of air which determines the healthfulness of a residence for a given number of persons; the superficial feet of earth they may cover

is an important item of consideration.” Yet it is by the utter disregard of this law in the construction of houses, so as to get the greatest possible return for the smallest possible outlay, that the comfort, health, life and morals of thousands are sacrificed.

Third. Neglect of Ventilation is a prevailing cause of ill health. The absolute necessity of pure air to health and life, has before been referred to ; but its importance demands more than a passing notice. It has justly been remarked by another, “that the evils of defective ventilation are less understood and acknowledged, than the operation of other deleterious agents ; for while these last destroy, they also warn by their offensive odors ; but imperfect ventilation may exist without appreciable offensiveness to the air which we breathe.” The following table exceedingly well illustrates the indispensableness of a due supply of pure air.

| PERSONS. | CUBIC FEET OF AIR. | PER CENT. | | | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|--------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|--------|
| | | Spitting of Blood. | Catarrh. | Other Diseases. | Total. | Spitting of Blood. | Catarrh. | Other Diseases. | Total. |
| 104 | Who had less than 500 | 13 | 13 | 18 | 44 | 12.50 | 1.25 | 17.31 | 42.31 |
| 105 | Who had from 500 to 600 | 5 | 4 | 23 | 32 | 4.25 | 3.63 | 20.00 | 27.82 |
| 101 | Who had more than 600 | 4 | 2 | 18 | 24 | 3.96 | 1.98 | 17.82 | 23.76 |

Yet in the face of such facts, many of the dwellings of the laboring classes are constructed as if to *prevent ventilation*. The houses themselves are so pent up as almost to exclude outward currents of air, and so arranged internally, that a draught of air through them is impossible. The atmosphere becomes necessarily loaded with noxious impurities, which produce, as has been shown, numerous fatal diseases. And these facts, which are of general application, specially apply to the *under-ground dwellings*, which, to the disgrace of humanity and civilization, are permitted to be tenanted in this city. It appears, as the result of an official investigation made three years ago, that

18,456 persons were crowded together in 3,742 cellars, of which about half had one room, and the number of occupants averaged over five to each basement. They were represented as “always damp, badly ventilated, generally filthy, and as germinating beds of pestilence and disease.” Since that time, the number of basements have so increased, that they now probably rival the cellar population of Liverpool, where the duration of life is *nineteen years less* than the average of Great Britain. Extensive recent examinations show that neither have these tenements nor the character of their inmates improved in late years; and that moral degradation, excessive liability to sickness, and a frightful curtailment of human life, are inevitable under such circumstances. Many of these basements are deluged by rain, and the foetid overflow of sinks and cess-pools; and their foul, damp, sepulchral-like air being never visited by pure air and sunlight, they are fitter receptacles for the dead than the living. It is, however, unnecessary to dwell on the debasing and destructive effects of such habitations, as if they were peculiar to New-York; for such effects are common wherever underground tenements are tolerated. Several important foreign cities are enforcing stringent regulations in respect to them. In Berlin, for example, the municipal authorities have *forbidden all cellars to be let as dwellings*, by an ordinance which took effect from July 1st, of the present year. They have also forbidden the construction of any dwelling room less *than eight feet in height*, the inhabiting of newly built houses until nine months after plastering, and the erection of any new house without a court-yard of at least seventeen feet square. In the larger towns and cities of England, the authorities have been forced to limit the number of occupants to the size of each house or apartment; and the following resolutions on the subject of ventilation, have been submitted by a Committee of the Government for parliamentary action:

1. That no living, sleeping, or work-room shall contain less than 144 superficial feet, or shall be less than eight feet high.

2. That such room shall have at least one window opening at the top.

-3. Also an open fire-place.

4. That in every living, sleeping or work-room erected in future, some method shall be adopted of allowing the foul air to escape from the upper part of the room.

5. That every such room in future, shall have some means of continually admitting fresh air.

6. In every public building in which gas is used, to insist upon the use of plans to carry off the products of combustion, and not to allow them to escape in a room.

7. That all churches, schools, theatres, work-shops, work-houses, manufactories and other public buildings, shall adopt such methods of ventilation as shall be approved by the medical health officer.

Such regulations would bespeak a wise and beneficent exercise of legislative power, and should be followed wherever the evils implied exist.

It should farther be observed, that the disregard of the health and comfort of the poor, extends most injuriously to their very means of subsistence. As cellars or store-rooms are not usually provided for food or fuel, they are unable, if so disposed, to exercise economical forecast, but must buy as they need, usually inferior articles, in small quantities, at the dearest rates. As every measure makes its own profit, prices advance inversely in proportion to quantity, so that the poor pay for their miserable supplies, some 20 or 30 per cent. more than the rich for superior articles. To avoid a tax which presses so heavily on their industry, they will even stow wood, coal, potatoes, &c., under their beds. Complaints are often made of the thriftlessness and improvidence of the poor; but what hope is there of improving their habits in this respect, without affording them better accommodations?

Again. *Domiciliary and personal cleanliness*, which are

indispensable to health, thrift and comfort, cannot be properly observed by the laboring classes as now provided for. They are, in fact, made filthy, reckless and vicious, by the force of circumstances, over which, in most cases, they have no control.

When families of five, eight or ten persons, each live in a contracted apartment, that is applied to every conceivable domestic use, and from fifteen to thirty such families in the same house—having the entry, stairway and yard in common, the last badly drained, perhaps unpaved, and the receptacle of all deleterious and offensive things, it would be truly surprising if the tenants did not become filthy, reckless and debased, whatever might have been their previous habits or character.

Demoralization. The limits of this Report will only allow a brief notice of the demoralizations consequent upon the conditions of life described, although this is of paramount importance, and on no other point is the evidence more abundant or conclusive. The absence of all necessary accommodations in many dwellings, and the crowded state of the rooms, which defies all attempts at decency and modesty, breaks down the barriers of self-respect, and prepares the way for direct profligacy. How should members, often of different families and of different sex sleep in the same room, nay, often in the same bed, without danger? “I know,” says one, “of nothing so demoralizing as the absence of private conveniences, and where there is a community of beds and bedrooms to all ages and both sexes.” Says another, “It is one of those influences, which, for want of a better term, may be called inhumanizing, because it tends to destroy those feelings and affections which are distinctive of the human being, and which raise him above the level of the brute.” So directly applicable to various localities and classes in this City, is the testimony on this subject, elicited by similar investigations in other places, as to justify a few brief extracts from them in this place.

Says one witness, “The habits of a family are more depressed

and deteriorated by the defect of their habitations, than the greatest pecuniary want to which they are subjected. The most cleanly and orderly female will invariably despond and relax her exertions under the influence of filth, damp and stench ; and at length, ceasing to make farther effort, will probably sink into a noisy, discontented, rum-drinking slattern—the wife of a man who has no comfort in his house, the parent of children whose home is the street or the work-house.” Again, “A filthy, squalid, unwholesome dwelling, in which none of the decencies common to society, even in the lowest stage of civilization, are, or can be observed, tends to make every dweller in such a hovel regardless of the feelings and happiness of each other, selfish and sensual ; and the connection is obvious between the constant indulgence of appetites and passions, and the formation of habits of idleness, dishonesty, debauchery and violence.”

In regard to the proneness of such persons to *intemperance*, it is said, “That the dreadful depression consequent on ill health (the effect of crowded, filthy, badly ventilated dwellings), tempts these poor creatures with a force we cannot adequately appreciate, to have recourse to stimulating drink.” “I must confess,” remarks another, “that the wonder to me is, not that so many of the laboring classes crowd to the liquor shops, but that so many are found struggling to make their wretched abodes a home for their family.” A physician also testifies “That the depressed and low condition of health in which these people are found, induces habits of intemperance, unfortunately so common amongst them.” To which may be added the observations of an employer, who says, “It may be taken as an axiom, that if you make the workingman’s home comfortable, he will give up the public house and its ruinous consequences ; and that where a workingman’s home is little better than a pig-stye, that man will always be an inhabitant of the public house, or beer shop.”

The connection of juvenile depravity which so fearfully abounds, with the wretched conditions of life described, is fully

shown by the Chief of Police Reports, and is too obvious and direct to require remark. Neither does it appear necessary to enlarge on the inefficacy of reformatory efforts, either as it respects parents or children, while their homes are destitute of order, cleanliness and decency; for uniform experience attests, that such physical degradation as is beyond their control, presents the most insurmountable obstacle to moral and religious improvement—"that before they can become good parents, children, or citizens, nay, we would almost dare to say Christians, their home must be made clean and attractive, and the impurity by which they are surrounded removed. As certainly as physical strength and moral and mental energy will become developed and increased under the influence of favoring circumstances and sanitary improvements, with equal certainty will their moral perceptions, feelings, affections and sentiments become elevated, and their susceptibility to the claims of religion, and of their duty to God, and to their fellow-men, be promoted."

The vast amount of sickness and high rate of mortality among the poor, should at least receive a passing notice. There are no statistics which show the relative difference in these respects between the laboring classes and those in easier circumstances; but it is not, therefore, the less certain, that in proportion to their number it is much greater. So obvious, indeed, is the influence of wretched tenements in occasioning the difference, that in the recent comparisons which have appeared in the papers, relative to the mortality in our four great Atlantic cities, so much to the disadvantage of New-York, such tenements have uniformly been referred to as the chief cause. There is another fact, in this connection, which deserves notice. Leaving out of view the infant mortality among the poor, occasioned by bad milk and other causes, which is probably four times as great as that among other classes; also that of recent emigrants who may be said to die *in transitu*; it is found that, among the adults whose deaths swell the bills of mortality, there is an undue pro-

portion of males, who are cut off in the prime of life, when best qualified to perform its duties, and when their labor is most needed for the maintenance of their families, who are thus thrown upon charity for support. Hence it is, that so large a proportion of the dependent are widows and fatherless children ; and to say nothing of the misery and suffering thus occasioned, hence also the immense tax on public and private charity, attendant upon ill health and premature mortality, from preventable or removable causes.

And it should be remembered, that the evils the laboring classes suffer from the enumerated causes, are greatly aggravated by a species of *sub-letting* which extensively prevails in most parts of the City, often subjecting them to the merciless exactions of capricious and unprincipled landlords, and also to the influence of circumstances, which cannot fail to degrade them. One or more buildings are leased by an individual, on terms that will pay a profit to the owner, who is thus relieved from the trouble of looking after the tenants, and of collecting rents. This sub-landlord re-lets apartments so as to save as much as possible, seldom caring how the occupants live, provided the rents are paid, which being required in advance, are generally sure. There are those who *daily* demand the rent in advance, and if unpaid, the tenant is turned into the street ; but usually apartments are taken by the week, sometimes by the month. The lessee often realizes twice as much for property as he pays for it, and at the same time crowds it to an extent which shows an utter disregard for the health and comfort of his tenants. The whole system of sub-tenantage should, in short, be regulated or broken up. For it not only oppresses the poor by its extortions, but its almost invariable tendencies are to augment their sufferings, and however fallen, to sink them into still deeper debasement. Justice to the poor requires a full exposure of this iniquitous system. But it can only in passing be remarked, that its effects are to encourage among the poor some of their worst

propensities and habits ; to become vagrant and uncleanly—for removals are frequent, and the tenements vacated being usually re-occupied with all their previous accumulations of filth, without cleansing, they become indescribably dirty and offensive. The buildings, moreover, in this way get out of repair, doors and floors are injured, windows broken, walls shattered and filled with vermin, yards and sinks neglected ; so that the laboring man's home, which should possess attractive and elevating associations, generally exhibits a scene of discomfort and repulsion, which is debasing to the occupant, and a reproach to civilization.

Let it not be imagined that the foregoing statements have been exaggerated. They fall, in fact, far short of the sad reality, as any one may convince himself by personal inspection ; the evils must be seen and felt, to be duly appreciated. Even that chiefly dwelt upon, the wretched physical condition of thousands of our poorer brethren, has been very inadequately described, while that which is incomparably more important, the deteriorating effects of that condition on their social and moral character, has only been incidentally noticed. Yet these topics cannot be farther enlarged upon than to remark, that it would be most unfair and incorrect to estimate character solely by outward circumstances ; for greater refinement of feeling, or nobler specimens of religious and moral worth, can nowhere be found, than in some of the habitations of the poor. Straitened and humble as may be the condition of this class, they manage to throw around them such circumstances as are compatible with the decencies of life. On the other hand, that class which unfortunately constitutes the great mass, whose condition, in many cases, is perhaps the most degraded that civilized life admits, generally includes in it persons of a corresponding grade of morals. What they are, in short, they are made to a greater or less extent, by circumstances over which they have but little control ; and vain will be the effort to elevate their character, without first improving their physical condition.

That such an improvement of their condition is practicable does not appear to admit of a reasonable doubt. Beneficent results may even be secured with profitable pecuniary investments. The poor pay three or four times as much in proportion for their miserable pent up cabins, as do the rich for their spacious and comfortable mansions. Their tenements yield at least from 15 to 20 per cent. income, after deducting lost rents and charges, while the better class of buildings occupied by the middle and wealthy classes, scarcely average more than 6 or 7 per cent. The surprise is not, therefore, that old houses and hovels should be suffered to remain as long as at all tenantable, but that when they are demolished, greater regard is not paid to the wants of the poor, by erecting well-contrived dwellings for their use, which would increase their comforts, give them the value of their money, and at the same time afford a higher percentage than the houses of a costlier class. But this has not been the general course of the capitalists and builders in this City. They pull down the habitations of the laboring class without building others of the improved kind, which should take their place; the tenants are consequently driven to find shelter elsewhere, though it be in cellars, and courts, and garrets, amidst vice, and filth, and wretchedness.

The families of the class in question are not only very numerous, but are rapidly increasing. There is now a great number of old tenements occupied by them, which must in a few years be rebuilt. But when torn down, if others are not erected for the laboring classes, where can they live? Live they must somewhere, and we already witness the expedients resorted to for this purpose. In different parts of the City there are expensive buildings, originally designed for single families, now crowded with numerous families of the poor, because not in demand for the class they were built for, and if not tenanted in this way, must remain empty. These buildings pay well, and the owners are satisfied; but they are not the kind that are in request in

these localities, and would have cost less, paid better, and have been more eligible, if they had been constructed expressly for the purpose to which they are applied. The wants of the population have evidently been misunderstood. As future improvements shall, therefore, be projected in places only adapted for dwellings, and not for business, and there are many such, why should not capitalists erect well-arranged tenements for the poor? And as such investments will at least be as profitable as other improvements, considerations of interest and duty alike urge their adoption.

Is it said that the poor are debased in their habits, and would prove troublesome tenants? Though such were the facts, must they be despised and their necessities disregarded? Has not God made them our brethren, that we should care for them as such? But to such objections it may be replied, that it is unjust to condemn persons in the mass. If many are of the above description, there are many others who would not suffer by comparison with persons in the higher conditions of life. If some—nay, if many are debased, what better could be expected from the circumstances in which they are obliged to live? Physical evils produce moral evils. Degrade men to the condition of brutes, and they will have brutal propensities and passions. “Treat men like dogs, and they will behave like dogs the world over.” Now, the poor, in this respect, have been uncared for, unsympathized with, and who can say, that under like circumstances, he would have been better than they? We would not hastily affirm what they would become under more favorable circumstances; yet very satisfactory conclusions may be drawn from analogy, and the nature of the change proposed. If those who are now crowded into filthy and uncomfortable rooms, were put in clean, well-contrived apartments, suited to their necessities, and charged less for the new accommodations than they paid for the old; if they were assured that there is a disposition to improve their condition, by giving all

that in this respect is necessary for their comfort, and can be afforded for the rent, on the expressed condition of punctuality and good conduct on their part, we would not only have a strong hold upon their gratitude, but upon their selfishness. They can in no other way serve themselves so well, as in doing their duty to the landlord, by the prompt payment of rent, and the preservation of his property. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude, that they will make every effort to do this, and not deliberately oppose their own interests.

For the collection of rents, an arrangement may easily be effected with one of the tenants, who can also exercise a supervision over the property, and thus relieve the owner from all trouble and anxiety. This plan having been tried, has been found far more advantageous and satisfactory, in every point of view, than sub-letting.

It should be remembered, moreover, that the tenants who pay by the week, are in a very different position from those who pay by the quarter. They *have no credit*, and if they do not pay in advance, or at the end of the week, they must remove at once. They cannot, if so disposed, practise the fraud sometimes attempted by tenants hiring by the quarter, who keep moving from one house to another, without paying any where, and it is but justice to them to say, that they rarely attempt it. But as facts will be more satisfactory than any reasonings on the subject, a brief account is subjoined, of an experiment made in Boston.

Some gentlemen of that city invested about \$8,000 in land, and in the construction of a brick building, arranged for sixteen families, allowing to each two rooms, separate cellars under lock and key, separate piazzas on which to dry clothes, &c., and also separate out-houses to each. The tenants were each likewise provided with a copper boiler, and one or more closets. The rents were made as low as a fair interest would admit; and were collected and paid over weekly by one of the tenants, who was

also intrusted with the care of the whole, for which services he occupied one of the tenements rent free. The tenants were chiefly Irish, taken as they offered themselves, rejecting only those of known bad habits. Many of them at the time were out of employment, and with very slender resources. But the rents were paid with great punctuality, for at the end of the year only a few cents remained due, and no repairs had been found necessary, excepting a few lights in the cellar windows. The result far exceeded the expectations of the proprietors, and was most satisfactory. If such improvements are desirable and practicable in other cities, they are pre-eminently so in New-York.

It would be easy to multiply arguments and illustrations in favor of the reforms suggested. Having, however, already unduly extended this Report, it remains to present a few remarks in respect to the remedies for the various evils considered. These, it is believed, may be found partly in the power of the sufferers themselves, partly in that of capitalists and landlords, and partly in the Legislature. In respect to the two last it may be said,

I. That the subject presents a forcible appeal to *capitalists* and *owners of real estate*, for they can alone engage in the work; and if neglected by them, on what tenable plea can they escape responsibility? Safe investments and increase of property is not all their duty. Providence has made them to differ from others in wealth, that they may fulfil the obligation of "doing good to others as they have opportunity." Such an opportunity as rarely occurs is here presented. Though it required sacrifices, should not those whose wealth has been chiefly acquired by the toil of the poor, make them for such an object? But as sacrifices are not demanded, that plea is taken away, and on them is conferred the singular privilege of becoming benefactors to the poor, with pecuniary advantage to themselves.

Some buildings, it is true, have here been erected for the

laboring classes, of a kind better suited to their object; which, as they are eagerly sought after by respectable tenants, and make good returns to the owners, at once prove the demand for such dwellings, and the wisdom of such investments. Most, however, of the new tenement houses are on so contracted and penurious a scale, that they are actually inferior, as it respects the essentials of a human dwelling, to many of the old buildings whose places they supply. The health and convenience of the tenants are the least considerations; and how the most may be realized for the smallest expenditure, appear to be the chief points studied or attained. In the demand for tenements, however inferior their character, they will be occupied, but by whom? Evidently by persons of the smallest means, who if not already steeped in debasement, will soon become so by the deteriorating influences around them, and probably as unprincipled and careless in the care of the property, and paying rent, as are the landlords about their comforts. And let not such owners complain, if such results follow with an endless train of collateral evils; for in an important sense they are responsible for them. Vice and pauperism will be perpetuated by such causes; the almshouse and prison be supplied with recruits, and the City burdened with taxes for their support. On the contrary, if capitalists and landlords consult the interest of the poor, only so far as to give them all they can afford to pay for, a sure foundation will be laid for their improvement in other respects, with advantage to themselves and benefit to the City. This may indeed be said to be one of the chief things needed, in order to complete for the laboring classes, such a system of reformatory agencies, as their condition requires. Certain it is, that various other means deemed essential to their physical and moral elevation, have long been actively employed, and that the success of these means has been greatly impeded if not rendered nugatory, by the want of these improvements.

II. The subject demands *legislative intervention*. Much as has hitherto been done by individual and associated efforts, these crying evils cannot, it is believed, be removed, or essentially diminished, without special legislative action. What the precise nature of that action should be, it may be premature, at this stage of the investigations, when sanitary movements among us are in their infancy, to define. That legal measures should be resorted to, and may be legitimately exercised, there can be no doubt. For while the law zealously guards individual liberty, it is not less careful that the liberty guaranteed, shall be so used as not to annoy others, or endanger public health. In other words, it recognizes no man's right to pollute the atmosphere of a neighborhood by breeding a pestilence in his own domicil. We are dependent upon legislation for supplies of water, construction of sewers, abatement of nuisances, and the inspection of numerous articles of food ; also for the protection of health, property, and life ; while it imperatively forbids under heavy penalties, whatever is indirectly incompatible with the security of these important objects. Such being the acknowledged duties and prerogatives of the Legislature, its power may and should be evoked, to enact and enforce all such sanitary regulations, as the peculiar position and condition of this great metropolis may be found to require.

Pure air, light and water being indispensable to health and life, if tenements are so badly constructed as to preclude a proper supply of these essential elements, the law should interpose for the protection of the sufferers, and either close up such dwellings, or cause them to be so re-modelled as to be fit for human habitations. Thus also in the construction of new tenements. A certain amount of superficial area, height of ceiling, facilities for heating and ventilation, &c., should be furnished, under suitable penalties for neglect, and the number of inmates to each limited by law, if practicable, as is now done on board emigrant ships. No nuisances, moreover, should be al-

lowed, and domiciliary cleanliness rigidly enforced wherever health was endangered by neglect.

In conclusion, a few objections to the foregoing suggestions may be very briefly considered :

1. The enforcement of the foregoing propositions would not interfere with the rights of property holders, inasmuch as nothing would be exacted that is not vital and important to the interests of the whole population, and which would not eventually tend to the benefit of the property owners themselves. Rents would not necessarily so increase as to place the improved or new tenements which combine the healthful and comfortable arrangements required by law, out of the reach of the poor. The relative number of dwellings and occupants would not be so changed as that the prices now paid for miserable houses should not, even in this City where rents are enormous, fail to secure decent habitations.

2. Nor would the enforcement of the plan suggested interfere with the rights of the tenant. No family, as before shown, has a right so to live as to endanger public health, and become an annoyance to others. In all cases of this kind such sanitary regulations should be enforced as would abate the evil. And the requisite legislative enactments for this end, when understood, would be regarded, it is believed, with favor by those they were intended to benefit. Many of the laboring classes are more alive to their privations than has been generally supposed. When once made acquainted with the terrible evils which result from their present modes of living, and neglect of cleanliness, at the same time have placed within their reach the means of forsaking their present filthy habits, in numerous cases it will be found, that so far from thwarting endeavors to promote their health and cleanliness, they will render every possible assistance; for they will discover that their own best interests are promoted by all those measures which are calculated to improve their sanitary condition.

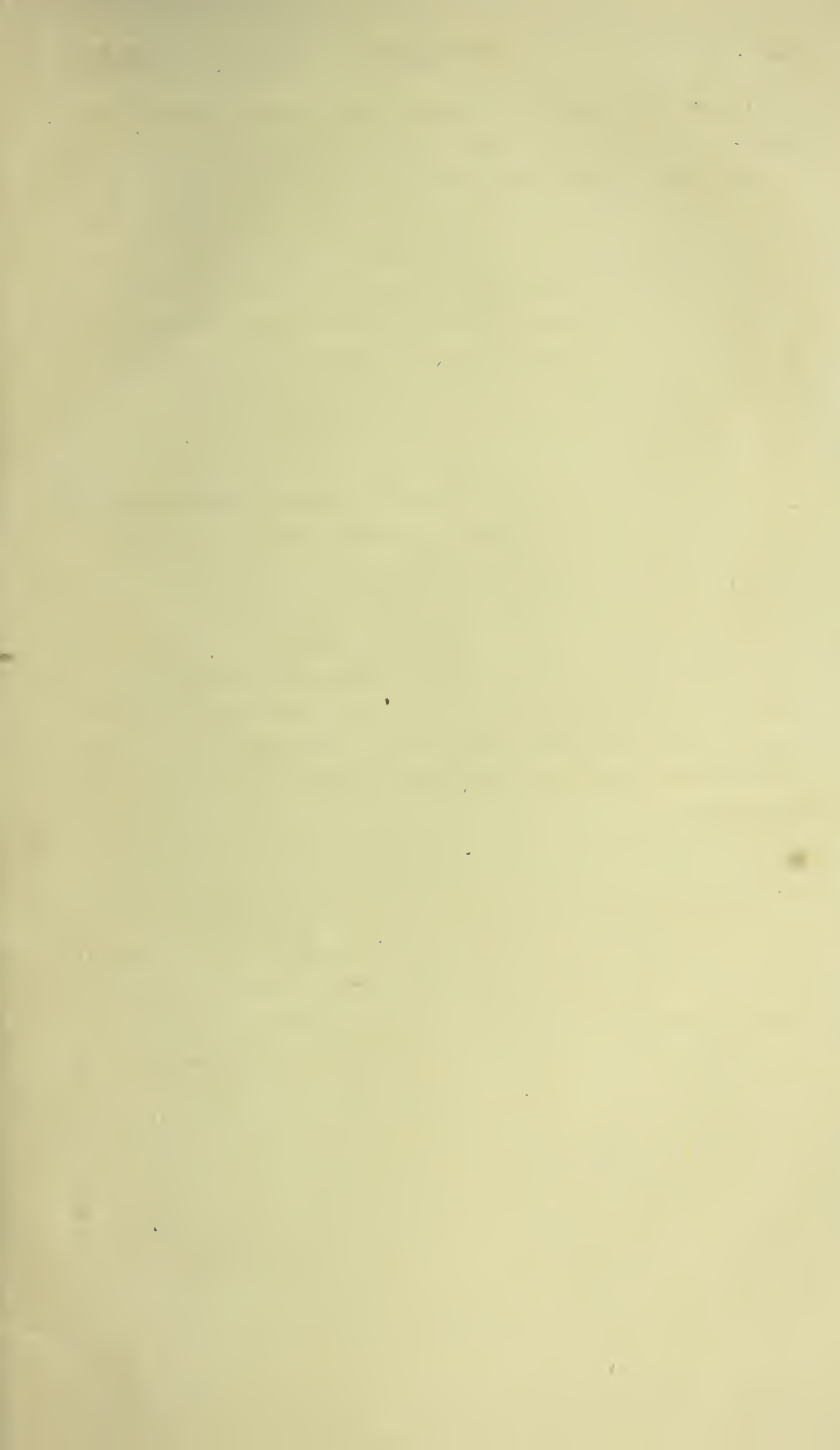
3. As no gratuitous benefits are designed, self-reliance among the poor would not be undermined, nor improper motives be presented to induce them to remain in the city. On the contrary, the prospect of a healthful, comfortable home would stimulate exertion, while its possession would exert a most salutary influence in reforming and elevating character.

4. The carrying out of this feature of the plan would legitimately fall within the scope of the City Inspector's duties. It would require no new machinery, but only such a modification of the existing laws as would reach, in order to remedy, the evils in question.

Let this and analogous measures be prosecuted, and, with the Divine blessing, it may be expected that great and noble ends will be attained. An increase of physical comforts will induce a higher tone of morals, and prepare the way for the success of religious influences. New tastes, new desires, new activities and purposes will be awakened among multitudes that have hitherto been almost labored with in vain; and a train of influences be set in operation, all tending to the permanent amelioration of their condition, and to the greatest good of the entire community.

At the stated meeting of the Board of Managers, October 10th, 1853, the Committee appointed under the foregoing Resolution of June 13th, made the preceding Report, which on motion was accepted, and ordered to be printed.

R. M. HARTLEY, *Secretary*.





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AND

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